
Central Iowa

Abusive Relationship Ends for Disabled Woman, New Life Begins

Judy Ahrens
Altoona, Iowa
515-967-7688

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Judy Ahrens first arrived at Iowa Legal Aid seeking legal advice about her marriage. After several meetings and telephone calls, Iowa Legal Aid discovered that Judy, whose health concerns including being blind, diabetic and confined to a wheelchair, was involved in not only an unstable marriage, but an abusive one as well. Because of her outstanding medical expenses, and the lack of resources for persons in her position, Judy requested assistance with a divorce action and protective order. Iowa Legal Aid represented Judy in a divorce action and Judy has now moved into a new apartment through the Section 8 Housing Assistance program and hopes to continue her education and seek some form of employment.

Real Estate Reassessment Saves Couple's Income

Howard and Sandra Cupples
Kellogg, Iowa
641-526-3297

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Rules and regulations from the Social Security Administration can be complex and difficult to negotiate. That is what the Cupples found when they received a notice from Social Security that they owed the agency more than \$11,000 because they owned a piece of real estate that had not been reported to the agency. Iowa Legal Aid was able to demonstrate that the Cupples had, in fact, reported the real estate in 1995, and furthermore, testimony from a realtor and the Department of Natural Resources demonstrated that since the property was in a flood plain and was zoned in a certain way, the real estate was essentially valueless. With a decision in their favor, Howard and Sandra were able to keep their assistance income at the same level, crucial for an elderly fixed-income couple.

Benefits Hearing Allows Disabled Man to Keep Living at Home

Dan Hoffman
Fairfield, Iowa
641-469-5735

Attorney: William Pepper
Phone: 641-683-3166

Dan Hoffman has Becker's Muscular Dystrophy, a progressive muscle wasting disease, and is confined to a wheelchair. Yet he is able to live in his own house in Fairfield with a daughter and granddaughter with the help of homemaker, home health, nursing, and other services through Medicaid. Dan called Iowa Legal Aid to ask for help after his request to the state to increase his level of care was denied. Iowa Legal Aid represented Dan in his appeal in front of an Administrative Law Judge, a hearing that he won.

Because Dan was able to add physical therapy and help with basic tasks like bathing and taking vitamin shots to his home healthcare, he is able to stay in his own home. Dan's services now cost the state \$2,480 per month, as compared to the \$4,767 per month as the statewide average cost in a nonhospital skilled care facility. Clearly, helping Dan be able to stay with his family is better for him and better for Iowa, too.

Dad's Dilemma: Child Support Due for Daughter at Home

Mike Reader
Palmer, Iowa
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Attorney: Evelyn Ocheltree
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Laid off from his job and collecting unemployment, Mike Reader couldn't afford his child support payments of \$283 a month. But he shouldn't have had to pay that cost – his daughter Erica was now living with him after the Department of Human Services and Juvenile Court had removed her from her mother's care. Unfortunately, the bureaucracy hadn't caught up, and Erica's mother would not agree to voluntarily suspend the child support order. Iowa Legal Aid filed the necessary paperwork to end the income withholding and to have Erica's mother reimburse Mike for the more than \$1,400 in overpaid support. Today, Mike is back at work, and Erica is doing well living with her dad.

Western Iowa

Nervous Breakdown Nearly Leads to Homelessness

Harold Richards
Council Bluffs, Iowa
712-256-3519

Attorney: Mike Tulis
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In June, 2000, Harold Richards refinanced his home to pay for a divorce and his ex-wife's share of the property settlement. Following the divorce, Harold suffered a nervous breakdown, began to miss work, and eventually quit his job. For six months, he secluded himself in his home, failing to pay his mortgage. Although Mr. Richards applied for credit disability insurance and credit unemployment insurance benefits he had purchased in connection with the refinanced mortgage, the insurance company had not received sufficient verification of his disability to cover the payments. A judgment foreclosing on Harold's house was entered against him, and a sheriff's sale of the property was scheduled.

With his son's help, Harold began to get medical treatment, and a private attorney referred him to Iowa Legal Aid for legal assistance. Through the Iowa Insurance Commissioner, legal aid convinced the insurance company to reexamine the case and then helped Harold gather medical reports to substantiate his claim. The insurance company approved the claim and paid the missed mortgage payments. The court set aside the foreclosure judgment a mere five days before Harold's redemption period expired. The assistance of Iowa Legal Aid prevented Harold from losing his home and allowed him to focus on regaining his health and returning to work.

Evening the Playing Field at Domestic Violence Hearing

Cathy Van Maanen
LeMars, Iowa
712-546-4316

Attorney: Frank Tenuta
Phone: 712-277-8686

Cathy Van Maanen first heard about Iowa Legal Aid through the Community Coalition Against Domestic Violence in LeMars. Cathy had obtained a domestic abuse order without an attorney, but when her husband violated the order, he was given a court-appointed attorney. Without an attorney for the contempt hearing, Cathy was at a distinct disadvantage. That's when she contacted Iowa Legal Aid. With Legal Aid's help, Cathy won the contempt hearing against her husband, and she has now established a safe home for herself and her children and is working in the community.

Eastern Iowa

Domestic Abuse Overcome by Immigrant Woman

Pattra Champaruang
Cedar Rapids, Iowa
(319) 365-8148

Attorney: Jenny Schulz
Phone: 319-364-6108

Pattra Champaruang and her five-year-old son followed her husband from Thailand to the United States looking for a better life. Unfortunately, things did not work out quite as she planned. Because of violence in her relationship with her husband, she sought shelter and was referred to Iowa Legal Aid by another service agency in Cedar Rapids. With help of Iowa Legal Aid she obtained a one year protective order and obtained custody of her son. Iowa Legal Aid then filed a divorce on Ms. Champaraung's behalf in which she got permanent custody of the couple's child and child support.

Shortly after the domestic abuse case was finished, the husband's sister sued Ms. Champaruang in small claims court for \$4,000 in back rent for the few months she had lived with her husband's family upon arriving in the United States, despite the fact that there was no lease agreement or any kind of contract for rent. Iowa Legal Aid assisted her in mediation, which was unsuccessful, and then at the trial, which she won. Well-educated, but with limited English and no real understanding of the U.S. legal system, Pattra could never have maneuvered through the system alone. She is now getting assistance from a volunteer lawyer to file for her taxes and get the Earned Income Credit.

With Housing Defense, College Student Graduates

Morgan Hoosman
City: Iowa City, Iowa
Phone: 319 341-4227

Attorney: Derek E. Johnson
Phone: 319-351-6570

Morgan Hoosman, a low-income single mother with two small children, had gone back to school at the University of Iowa. At the beginning of her last semester, Morgan lost her state child care subsidy because she had reached the end of the two-year limit. Without child care, Morgan would have to drop out of school, so she asked her mother to help watch the kids while she was in class.

Just before Morgan's graduation, the Iowa Housing Authority attempted to terminate her Section 8 benefits for her mother's assistance, saying she was an unauthorized person living in the household. Iowa Legal Aid represented Morgan, demonstrating that her mother had maintained her house in Waterloo, never moved any belongings into Morgan's apartment, and the two had been scrupulously careful to follow the rules to avoid co-mingling their incomes or even food supplies. Morgan won the case, was able to keep her Section 8 housing, and has completed a Bachelor's degree. She is now beginning a career as a social worker. The legal help she was provided will allow her to move forward with her plans to become self sufficient.

Stalking Victim gets Protective Order

Catherine Soto

City: Waterloo, Iowa

Phone: 319-961-5399

Attorney: Vivian Meyer Betts

Phone: 319-235-7008

Catherine Soto was referred to Iowa Legal Aid by the Family Service League for help with a protective order. She had filed her own Petition with the Court, but sought representation at the time of her hearing. She was being stalked by her former boyfriend. Cathy is a single parent raising an adolescent son.

After the temporary protective order was served, her boyfriend tried to run her off the road while she was driving. He also came to her home late at night. Iowa Legal Aid represented Cathy at her hearing on the permanent protective order and the contempt proceedings. The client was given a permanent protective order and the boyfriend was ordered to serve a jail sentence for each of the violations. Cathy is now working two part-time jobs while she is completing her degree in law enforcement and plans to go on and get her four-year degree at the University of Northern Iowa.

Modification of Custody Case to Allow Children to Remain in Dubuque

Renee Weis

Dubuque, IA

Phone: 563-556-3636

Attorney: Diane DiPietro Wilson

Phone: 563-588-4653

In late 2000, Renee Weis received word that her ex-husband and the father of her children was coming to Dubuque to celebrate the Christmas holidays. He also informed her that the children were going to now live with him in Alabama, a place the children had only visited once. He directed that the children's educational records be transferred to his local school district. They were to depart to live in Alabama immediately after the Christmas holiday. The children would have been uprooted from the only hometown and family they had ever known to go live in a strange place.

Though the couple's marriage had been dissolved in 1999, there was no custody order in place directing which parent had primary custody over the children. Ms. Weis came to Iowa Legal Aid for help. Neither she nor the extended family wanted to see the children uprooted. Through the efforts of Iowa Legal Aid Ms. Weis received representation and filed for a modification of the dissolution of marriage decree. The Judge issued a temporary order directing that the children were to remain with her until a hearing could be held on the custody issue. In October, 2002 a Dubuque County Judge entered an order directing that the children should remain in Dubuque for the school year and spend a significant time in the summer with their father in Alabama. Ms. Weis was also awarded child support. Ms. Weis is completing school and plans to work in office management.